

www.culturaldemocracy.net

Beyond Social Inclusion

Towards Cultural Democracy

Cultural Policy Collective

Beyond Social Inclusion Towards Cultural Democracy

Cultural Policy Collective

Socialism would never have entered the world if its proponents had sought only to excite the enthusiasm of the working classes for a better order of things. What made for the power and authority of the movement was that Marx understood how to interest the workers in a social order which would both benefit them and appear to them as just. It is exactly the same with art. At no point in time, no matter how utopian, will anyone win the masses over to a higher art; they can be won over only to one nearer to them. And the difficulty consists precisely in finding a form for art such that, with the best conscience in the world, one could hold that it is a higher art. This will never happen with most of what is propagated by the avant-garde of the bourgeoisie.

– Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*

The oppressors, who oppress, exploit and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both. Any attempt to 'soften' the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity; indeed, the attempt never goes beyond this. In order to have the continued opportunity to express their 'generosity,' the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well. An unjust social order is the permanent fount of this 'generosity,' which is nourished by death, despair, and poverty.

– Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Scotland: Cultural Policy Collective, 2004

www.culturaldemocracy.net

e-mail: contactus@culturaldemocracy.net

This publication is the product of discussions amongst cultural workers, academics and policy-makers from Scotland, Ireland and England. Its content was discussed at a seminar held at the Lemon Tree, Aberdeen in October 2003.

The Cultural Policy Collective would like to acknowledge the financial support of the Scottish Arts Council.



*thelemon*tree

CONTENTS

The Argument

1	Introduction	1
2.	Beyond Social Inclusion	4
3.	History Matters: 'Squeezed Between Art and Commerce'	14
4.	Towards Cultural Democracy	23
5.	Conclusion	35
	Further Reading	44

The Argument

Cultural democracy refers to a set of political arguments addressing inequalities in cultural provision and challenging the destructive influence of the marketplace. Although never aligned to a particular party, it has informed grassroots arts projects and radical approaches to cultural policy. By contrast, present government initiatives are premised on the top-down 'democratisation' of culture, a process aimed at engaging members of 'excluded' groups in historically privileged cultural arenas. Such a policy neither reforms the existing institutional framework of culture, nor reverses a process of damaging privatisation. Instead, it attempts to make the arts more accessible in order to adapt its target audiences to an increasingly deregulated labour market. Against this questionable form of democratisation, our arguments for cultural democracy emphasise people's rights to public space and the public sector as domains of democratic expression. They challenge the dominance of both the market and the state in defining the existing avenues of cultural development.

Under the impact of globalisation, governments have identified cultural industries as sources of urban regeneration and cultural activity as an instrument of social change. But these policies are underpinned by neoliberal politics, promoting economic 'flexibility' and greater insecurity. Rather than confront growing inequality and social fragmentation, politicians focus instead on small-scale projects that demonstrate forms of 'inclusion' or 'diversity'. These may appear to be democratic, but, we argue, they are market-led and tokenistic. For cultural policy under New Labour, various forms of co-option are the order of the day.

Alternatively, we prioritise sites within the public sector as arenas for the development of democratic cultural expression. We discuss the reinvigoration of public service broadcasting in the form of a democratic television network. We emphasise the potential of an expanded network of public libraries as multi-use cultural centres, reversing the concentration of arts venues in urban areas. And we challenge the discourse of 'cultural diversity', arguing instead for a concentration on the histories and experience of immigration as the best means of opposing racism.

Cultural democracy emphasises the importance of reflective knowledge and meaningful communication for a healthy polity. Universal cultural provision is a right and is crucial to any process of democratic change.

1. Introduction

Social inclusion is one of the buzz phrases of the Blair era, a term at once superficially acceptable and conceptually involved. The wide-ranging policy that sustains it lies at the heart of the New Labour project, supported by vast sums of public money, an army of civil servants and a forest of academic research. Indeed, there can be few areas of the public sector or social policy that have not been touched by social inclusion; it affects the lives of millions of British citizens, whether they are aware of it or not.

In recent years, social inclusion policy has also had a dramatic impact on the public provision of the arts, controlling funding outcomes, defining employment opportunities, transforming the character of cultural programmes and shaping the form of finished works. For many arts managers and politicians such extensive influence has been benign. Inclusion policy encourages a democratisation of cultural practice and stimulates quantifiable social and economic progress. It compels elitist institutions and distracted artists to be more socially aware; it offers its target population a range of benefits, not the least of which is the acquisition of skills to help them contribute more effectively to the world of work. If social inclusion policy overtly instrumentalises cultural practice, then this is justified in terms of its progressive outcome: a culture and society both more equal and democratic.

Beyond Social Inclusion challenges the basis of these assumptions and offers a radical alternative to a policy which on the ground, at least, appears to enthuse a dwindling number of its erstwhile supporters. It has been written collectively by a group of artists, curators, educators and cultural workers in Scotland, all of whom have found themselves questioning through experience the validity of social inclusion policy in the arts. The process of writing began with small discussions, led to a pooling of experiences and incorporated an informal seminar held in October 2003. It has resulted in the collective conviction that arts workers interested in progressive cultural policy must urgently formulate a viable alternative to current strategies. In its argument this pamphlet presents what we believe is the beginning of that alternative. It is aimed at cultural producers of all kinds (including those in the established institutions), community workers, trade unionists and the 'victims' of social inclusion projects, those who in our experience often already question the benefits of such policies to their daily lives. In what follows we criticise current programmes before sketching out the way

ahead. Our criticism is directly engaged with the politics of social inclusion, a topic which the proponents of inclusiveness through the arts have, for the most part, chosen to ignore.

So why now? What is it about the current conjuncture that compels a group of cultural workers to challenge a policy which – in its effort to smooth over crippling social and economic divisions – is arguably the ideological pillar of New Labour politics? First, because it is increasingly obvious that a growing body of the policy's art world enforcers – the social includers themselves – no longer believe in it. This rising professional scepticism, never in itself decisive, was amply demonstrated at a so-called 'Visioning Event' staged in Edinburgh in May 2003 by Capital City Partnership, the agency responsible for co-ordinating the activities of those working in the city's Social Inclusion Zones. Bringing together outreach specialists from core-funded institutions, as well as representatives of community organisations working on the fringes of state funding, the meeting attempted to forge a consensual view of social inclusion through the arts. But, despite the occupational diversity of those involved, the social delineation of vastly different cultural interests and influences was kept firmly out of the discussion. Inevitably, the rallying 'vision' proved elusive. The fact that so few arts managers possess the basic theoretical tools to begin to negotiate questions of cultural and social difference is worrying enough. But as the meeting also revealed, the atmosphere of contest that surrounds social inclusion is impossible to repress, not least when there is mounting concern, especially amongst public sector workers, about the nature of the social order into which arts workers are attempting to incorporate the 'excluded'. It is the links between cultural policy and political reality, sundered for much of the last quarter century, that this pamphlet aims to restore. We don't imagine that those naively trying to cobble together a vision of a democratic culture free from politics will alter their opinions overnight. But we do hope that they will at least feel inspired to engage with our critique.

The issues raised by the questions 'inclusion into what, and to what end?' are central to our argument, and it is here that this pamphlet diverges most emphatically from the swelling corpus of largely technocratic literature addressing the social and economic impact of the arts.¹ Our discussions began in the run-up to the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq, at a time when historically unprecedented numbers of citizens – including, most strikingly, self-organising groups of young people – were marching on the streets of Britain against the conflict. They continued in the aftermath of the Scottish elections of May 2003

1. For a summary of this literature see Michelle Reeves (2001), 'Measuring the economic and social impact of the arts: a review' at <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/downloads/information/measuring.pdf>.

which saw, thanks to proportional representation, six Scottish Socialist and seven Green MSPs elected to the national parliament. In Britain, France, Germany, Brazil and elsewhere there is growing evidence that Third Way politics, the dominant ideology of the Clinton and Blair era, has lost its popular legitimacy and is exhausted, despite some recent efforts to revive it.

These events inevitably became part of our debate as we described to each other the narrowing of our creative possibilities, marked by the top-down instrumentalisation of cultural practice and the ongoing commercialisation of the public sector. The connections between these disparate developments became more apparent and we have drawn on various historical and theoretical resources to help make sense of them.² As we argue, cultural democracy is best defined by political arguments addressing inequalities in cultural provision and calling into question the rule of the marketplace in our daily lives. By contrast, New Labour's initiatives are premised on the limited 'democratisation' of existing cultural practices, directing public (and private) resources at members of 'excluded' groups in historically privileged cultural arenas. Such policies neither reform the present institutional framework, nor address its relationship to market forces. Instead, they attempt to make the arts more accessible in order to adapt populations to the demands of the labour market. Against this highly questionable form of democratisation, our arguments for cultural democracy focus on the right to public space as an arena of autonomous cultural development and democratic expression. This points to the significance of connecting arguments for cultural democracy to the defence of the public sector (rather than some more nebulous conception of the public sphere), as well as the urgency of developing forms of political self-activity beyond the hidebound traditions of labourism.³

As the concessions offered by New Labour prove ever more threadbare and its embrace of the market ever more intense, the spaces for a mass restructuring of politics become daily more apparent. In its attention to the conditions of cultural democracy, this pamphlet forms a small contribution to that wider task. We look forward to the response, in solidarity or otherwise, of our readers.

2. These include the writings of the German critic, Walter Benjamin, the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire and the Hungarian-born philosopher, István Mészáros. Freire's and Benjamin's writings are discussed in greater detail below. Mészáros' arguments for the structural crisis of the capital system, a crisis he dates to the early 1970s, provide a materialist explanation of the steady diminution of the once institutionally safeguarded freedoms that those of us who work in the arts are now experiencing. See especially *Beyond Capital: Towards a Theory of Transition*, (London: Merlin Press, 1995).

3. To this extent we wish to strengthen the political aspects of recent writing on cultural policy. See in particular, Jim McGuigan, *Culture and the Public Sphere*, (London: Routledge, 1996) and Toby Miller and George Yúdice, *Cultural Policy*, (London: Sage, 2002). We discuss further the implications of this in the Conclusion.

2. Beyond Social Inclusion

Social inclusion in the arts owes its existence to a far deeper strand of public policy lying at the heart of the New Labour government. This chapter presents a critique of this policy before examining more specifically its impact on the public provision of culture. The reactionary character of social inclusion policy has been widely argued by sociologists and social policy specialists, although their writing seems to have been little read by arts managers. This failure to make the connections between cultural practice and public policy more generally has proved very disabling. As we argue here, social inclusion policy in the arts offers very little to progressive social change. Indeed, its most lasting influence may be that of distracting attention from the cultural and political measures required to combat rising inequality and its ever starker diminution of human potential.

The Discourse of Social Exclusion

The term 'social exclusion' first began to figure in European politics during the 1980s – a dying refrain, it might be said, of social democracy. For some it seemed a progressive concept, reversing the Thatcherite dogma that 'there is no such thing as society' and offering a challenge to the victim-blaming theorists of the 'underclass'. It appeared to offer a more nuanced understanding of poverty and the reasons for it, stressing a range of factors beyond income. A standard sociological definition points to its potential breadth and complexity:

Social exclusion is defined as a multi-dimensional process, in which various forms of exclusion are combined: participation in decision making and political processes, access to employment and material resources, and integration into common cultural processes. When combined, they create acute forms of exclusion that find a spatial manifestation in particular neighbourhoods.⁴

In theory, at least, social exclusion's solution – inclusion – offers the promise of a just society.

In practice, however, social inclusion policy has invariably been accompanied by a more dubious politics. For François Mitterand in France, during the 1980s, it

4. Ali Madanipour et. al. (eds.), *Social Exclusion in European Cities: Processes, Experiences and Responses*, (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd., 1998), p. 22.

proved a powerful weapon in depoliticising debates over poverty and neutralising the demand from the left for income redistribution.⁵ The policy was next adopted by the European Commission during the early 1990s when it was conceived as an adequate response to rising unemployment, declining welfare provision and the social problems created by the destabilising transition to market economies in central and eastern Europe. In Britain, social inclusion quickly became a key device of New Labour, first in opposition, but then most emphatically with the establishment of its Social Exclusion Unit after its election victory in 1997. Under the banner of Third Way politics it became a policy promoted by politicians implacably opposed to the redistribution of material and productive resources. Over the last six years, the objectives of social inclusion have come to dominate the activities of numerous organisations and agencies, including charities and trusts like the Joseph Rowntree Foundation; liberal ‘think tanks’ like Demos; academic funding bodies; as well as the popular writing of economists such as Will Hutton.⁶ In short, social exclusion appears as a populist discourse of late capitalism. It is no surprise that the public provision of culture should be caught up in its expansive orbit.

This brief sketch of the evolution of social inclusion policy encourages an historical understanding of its emergence out of the decline of Keynesian welfare-capitalism, a process that dates from the mid 1970s.⁷ To that extent it has been a policy designed to accompany, rather than counteract, the collapse of full employment and the abandonment of universalist welfare provision over the last three decades. In its current British manifestation, social inclusion policy promotes equality of opportunity (through education, training and access to paid work), rather than equality (through measures granting collective rights and the public redistribution of resources). It de-emphasises the language of poverty in favour of the more ambiguous concept of exclusion; and it underlines the importance of an individual’s social obligations and responsibilities, rather than

5. See Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), pp. 425ff. for the emergence of the language of exclusion in France. As they argue, the term replaced the more denunciatory concept of exploitation and is too vague to be useful in mobilising opposition to neoliberalism.

6. For an account of inclusion policy under New Labour see Ruth Levitas, *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour*, (London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1998).

7. Under pressure from finance capital and the International Monetary Fund, James Callaghan announced the transition to monetarism at the Labour Party Conference in 1976. His government subsequently introduced over £5 billion of public expenditure cuts thus ushering in the era of Thatcherite attacks on the welfare state and the labour movement. See Leo Panitch and Colin Leys, *The End of Parliamentary Socialism*, (London: Verso, 2001), pp. 107ff.

the wider political rights of the public citizen.⁸ The fundamental nature of capitalism is never discussed by the proponents of social inclusion. Privatisation is often assumed to be socially beneficial and the power of global markets unassailable.

Thus despite the theoretical ‘multi-dimensionality’ of the sociological conception of social exclusion, there are important dimensions – notably the fair distribution of economic power – which social inclusion policy over the years has routinely dismissed. If the discourse of social exclusion has served to obscure debate about material inequality, it has equally successfully negated the language of class. Indeed, the discourse of social exclusion has helped eradicate challenges to inequality as a social issue, not least by supplanting or suppressing other political languages. As one sociologist puts it:

... to define a group or individual as ‘socially excluded’ (especially when policy intervention is envisioned) is to plan for their ‘inclusion’ – a process which might be seen as a form of regulating the poor, rather than envisioning radical possibilities for overcoming the very basis of inequality itself.⁹

In this sense social inclusion policy is very much a continuation of the attack on collectivist politics pursued by the Thatcher governments during the 1980s with devastating effect. Inclusion may appear a progressive ideal, but in reality it means incorporating the poor into a capitalist economy driven by accumulation beyond human need, an economy founded on their exploitation.

For any adequate assessment of inclusion policy, the question ‘inclusion into what?’ is crucial. For New Labour the answer has been overwhelmingly the world of work. Its leadership has consistently conceived of inclusion in terms of (usually low-paid) employment; most social inclusion programmes – including those in the cultural sector – reflect this premise. Indeed, for proponents of social inclusion policy the excluded have always been the un- or under-employed; the included always the majority active in the labour force.¹⁰ This raises some important questions about the changing character of what economists term the ‘reserve army of labour’ in post-industrial societies, an issue which we cannot deal

8. See Ruth Lister’s definition of British social inclusion policy in ‘From equality to social inclusion: New Labour and the welfare state’, *Critical Social Policy*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1997, pp. 215-25.

9. Michael Sammers, ‘Immigration, “ethnic minorities”, and “social exclusion” in the European Union: a critical perspective’, *Geoforum*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1998, p. 139.

10. See David Sibley, ‘The problematic nature of exclusion’, *Geoforum*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1998, pp. 119-21.

with here.¹¹ For now it is enough to point out that New Labour's vision of inclusion is as narrow and impoverishing as that of its neo-conservative allies.

The policy of social inclusion, then, focuses on regulating the poor's access to the labour market whilst closing down the tendency on the part of citizens to struggle collectively for a fairer future. It assumes that current labour market conditions are positive and unchangeable, hiding the reality that low-wage economies and mass structural unemployment have been deliberately forged over the last three decades by nation states blind to the destructive consequences of capital's growth. Rhetorically, the 'included' remain an homogenous mass, distracting attention from the fact that an increasingly small percentage of the population own an ever larger segment of our collective wealth. For those outside work – the elderly, the disabled, those who volunteer or do domestic labour – social inclusion policy often either fails to take them into account or actively works against their interests. It establishes criteria for inclusion that may be impossible for those with special needs to fulfil.¹² Similarly, in its emphasis on the world of work, the policy offers little protection to those like migrant workers who may have fewer rights under the law, or for whom integration into the majority's culture is a disturbing prospect.¹³ For most of the excluded, inclusion operates less as a mechanism of liberation than a top-down programme of social control.

In August 1997, the new Blairite Cabinet Office minister, Peter Mandelson, announced the establishment of the government's Social Exclusion Unit by suggesting that the redistribution of wealth from rich to poor provided only a 'limited definition of egalitarianism'.¹⁴ Limited, perhaps, but also absolutely necessary: New Labour's refusal to countenance redistribution has meant that after six years its social inclusion policies have made little impact on poverty in Britain. For one ex-New Labour minister the situation in 2003 was 'worse than under Thatcher', with inequality escalating towards American dimensions. In 2002, according to government statistics, the share of national income of the poorest fifth of British society had dropped to 6%, whilst the share of the top fifth

11. See David Byrne's discussion in *Social Exclusion*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999), pp. 44ff. As he points out, one of the results of inclusion policy is to increase competition at the lower end of the labour market, reinforcing the regulatory effect of the unemployed on the low-waged. For an important critique of Byrne, see Peter Kennedy, 'Social policy, social inclusion and commodity fetishism', unpublished paper, 2004.

12. See Edward Hall, 'Social geographies of learning disability: narratives of exclusion and inclusion', *Area*, forthcoming, 2004.

13. This is a question which deserves closer investigation. However, see Samers, 'Immigration, "ethnic minorities", and "social exclusion" in the European Union'.

14. Quoted in Levitas, *The Inclusive Society?*, p. 149.

had risen to 46%.¹⁵ Indeed, as we drafted this pamphlet an array of depressing statistics appeared, suggesting that New Labour policies to counteract poverty have failed. The gap between rich and poor is now wider than any other time since the Second World War with around a quarter of the population living on less than the average income. In global terms, the wealthiest five per cent of the world's people now earn 114 times as much as the poorest five per cent. Despite a specific promise by government to eradicate child poverty by 2020, Britain's poorest children are less likely to escape their situation now than they were in 1997.¹⁶ Today at every level of government – local, national, global – social policy is enacted to support corporate, rather than collective human interests.

Although the Scottish Parliament has widely trumpeted its commitment to social justice, the situation north of the border is, if anything, even more disturbing. According to recent estimates, a quarter of all adults and 38% of Scottish children are living in poverty. Around one fifth of Scottish households are currently without work and nearly 45% of those in Scotland who are in work could be considered low-paid (a full-time minimum wage income brings in around £8,700 per year). It is estimated that some 750,000 households in Scotland cannot afford to heat their homes during the winter to adequate standards.¹⁷ The chances of social inclusion policy doing anything to alleviate such shocking deprivation are slight – most of the jobs recently created by the Scottish economy continue to be at the low end of the pay scale or comprise part-time work in the service sector. In Scotland, the terms under which the excluded are integrated into the labour market continue to be fundamentally unequal.

In early 2002, Scotland's MSPs awarded themselves a 13.5% pay increase, amounting to a rise in income of around £6,000 a year. In this context it is difficult not to conclude that most of Scotland's parliamentarians are happy to sanction a policy that in practice mainly dragoons the excluded into low paid work. Social inclusion policy's real aim is to prevent inequality becoming too obvious. It can never be the weapon of those who wish to eradicate poverty altogether.

15. Michael Meacher, 'Worse than under Thatcher', *Guardian*, 15 July 2003.

16. John Carvel, 'Postcode survey finds widening gap between rich and poor', *Guardian*, 12 June 2003; George Monbiot, 'The worst of times', *Guardian*, 2 September 2003, p. 21; and 'Child poverty pledge "likely to fail"', *Guardian*, 25 June 2003. See also Richard B. Freeman (ed.), *Inequality Around the World*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

17. These figures are all taken from the Lothian Anti-Poverty Alliance web site, <http://www.lapa.org.uk>. Full references can be found there. See also Usha Brown et. al. (eds.), *Poverty in Scotland 2002: People, Places and Policies*, (London: CPAG, 2002) and Carol Murray, *Towards a Living Wage*, (Glasgow: Scottish Low Pay Unit, 2003).

Social Inclusion and the Arts

That cultural policy makers, proud of their ethic of public accountability, should so willingly have succumbed to social inclusion policy in the face of such substantial criticism is troubling indeed. With some notable exceptions, our experience of the attitude of arts managers in Scotland towards the policy has been one of grudging and sometimes cynical acceptance.¹⁸ Such complacency is symptomatic of a wider political passivity, but also perhaps of a generalised refusal of solidarity and the alienation induced by overly specialised creative (and institutional) practice. Social exclusion discourse, it seems, also finds its victims amongst the included.

Over the last six years social inclusion policy has easily harnessed culture to its logic of 'amelioration'. Wielding the language of inclusiveness, culture's cohesive potential has been endlessly promulgated from above. The immediate policy impetus lies with New Labour and the establishment in 1997 of its Department of Culture, Media and Sport, supported by the Social Exclusion Unit (in particular its Policy Action Team 10) and in Scotland the publication in August 2000 of the Executive's 'National Cultural Strategy'. Under New Labour the usefulness of culture has invariably been made explicit, aimed at expanding the contribution of the 'creative industries' to the economy – estimated at £112.5 billion in 2001 – and supposedly fostering a general well-being, not least amongst the poor. For one typical Blairite theorist, culture handily displaces politics altogether: 'governing by cultures' is 'now the centre of the agenda for government reform...the most important determinant of a combination of long-run economic success and social cohesion'.¹⁹ The Scottish Executive puts it more bluntly: 'culture promotes social cohesion'; it has an 'important role to play in sustaining, developing and regenerating communities'; it gives 'people opportunities to acquire skills and experience which are useful in the labour market'.²⁰

New Labour's conviction about the usefulness of culture to the market finds its roots in policy developments during the 1980s as a variety of state agencies were compelled by government to justify the character and legitimacy of their funding programmes. Although this process is sometimes explained as a response to a generalised crisis of cultural authority in the face of postmodernist relativism, the formation of cultural policy was also subject to a political contest of far greater

18. The only journal to offer consistent opposition to social inclusion policy is the Glasgow-based cultural magazine, *Variant*, the back editions of which can be viewed at <http://www.variant.org.uk>.

19. Perri 6, 'Governing by cultures', in Geoff Mulgan (ed.), *Life after Politics: New Thinking for the Twenty-First Century*, (London: Fontana, 1997), p. 272.

20. The National Cultural Strategy is available at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/nationalculturalstrategy>.

import. The gains for cultural democracy made during the early 1980s by bodies like the Greater London Council were swiftly neutralised by the Thatcher government, part of a wider assault on the public sector on behalf of corporate capital.²¹ Much weakened by the ferocity of the neoliberal onslaught, a new economism swept through the arts sector as it turned to justifying its patronage in terms of its contribution to job creation, revenue generation through tourism, and urban renewal. By 1988, and the publication of John Myerscough's *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain*, an already suggestible community had succeeded in convincing itself. Accounting for the social and economic impact of the arts became its best and only defence. At the same time, struggles over the content of its patronage were increasingly reduced to a superficial pluralism entirely in tune with the consumer-driven blandishments of an expanding culture industry.

This transition has now to be acknowledged as a major defeat: without this recognition there is no way ahead. New Labour's wholesale harnessing of cultural policy for social ends is only its latest, most desperate, manifestation. Not surprisingly, the last two or three years have witnessed mounting protest about inclusion policy, perhaps especially on the part of curators and artists.²² Their case has been ably supported by damning analysis of the shoddy methodology used to justify social inclusion programmes, not least that utilised by François Matarasso in his influential 1997 apology *Use or Ornament?*²³ (The role of private sector consultancies and freelancers in promoting the social inclusion agenda certainly requires closer investigation – their vested interests do not always lie in conducting probing research.) As the major beneficiaries of shifts in funding, art educators remain the most ambivalent about social inclusion, although there is widespread unease about the redirection of education programmes towards training for jobs, rather than a deeper emancipation.²⁴

21. See Christopher Bradley, *Mrs. Thatcher's Cultural Policies: 1979-1990*, (Boulder, Colorado: Social Science Monographs, 1998).

22. See, for example, Andrew Brighton, 'Cascading banality', *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2002, pp. 111-18 and 'Save our souls', *Museums Journal*, July 2003, pp. 18-19; Stephen Dawber, 'The chimera of social inclusion', *Matters*, 17, 2003, pp. 37-38; and various contributions to Josie Appleton et. al., *Museums for 'The People'?*, (London: Academy of Ideas Ltd., 2001) and Mark Wallinger and Mary Warnock (eds.), *Art for All? Their Policies and Our Culture*, (London: Peer, 2000).

23. See Eleonora Belfiore, 'Art as a means of alleviating social exclusion: does it really work? A critique of instrumental cultural policies and social impact studies in the UK', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2002, pp. 91-106 and especially Paola Merli, 'Evaluating the social impact of participation in arts activities', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2002, pp. 107-18.

24. For a sense of this ambivalence see the various essays in 'Inclusion under pressure', *engage*, no. 11, 2002.

Our experience of social inclusion programmes has been one of fundamental tokenism, not least in the way they recruit willing representatives from targeted zones without considering the non-participation of far wider sections of their population. The focus on encouraging self-help through the fostering of cultural skills reflects a wider reduction of public investment in training and a shift of emphasis towards encouraging the competitive functions of individual human capital.²⁵ Due to a paucity of funding, a lack of sustained engagement with participants is typical, with the result that many outreach projects are bureaucratically regimented to produce bland outcomes with little communicative power. Too many programmes are governed by a missionary ethos, projecting a set of hierarchically-defined cultural interests from the centre to the margins – their content often bears scant relation to the lives of those they aim to ‘improve’. Indeed, in our experience arts projects in deprived areas often prove counter-productive as local people – rightly or wrongly – perceive them as being promoted at the expense of more urgent priorities like housing, safe play-areas, or proper policing. Time and again, we have found ourselves combating serious, structurally-induced social problems with miniscule resources and no external support.

Without dealing directly with structural inequalities, social inclusion policy is ineffectual as a democratic instrument, functioning mainly as a cosmetic mask to disguise unequal power relations. Indeed, it is the potential of a wider cultural politics that social inclusion programmes deliberately exclude: it is this which cultural producers now need urgently to recover. Whatever the local victories (and from our experience they are remarkably few), social inclusion policy will never work: egalitarian aspirations cannot be grafted onto the market. In this sense current efforts by various agencies to strengthen their economic and social impact assessments are counter-productive – they contribute only to expanding, rather than restraining, capital’s field of action. Likewise, the shift by arts councils towards promoting cultural diversity will prove empty without a reinvigorated struggle around the politics of redistribution. As we argue in the final chapter of this pamphlet, the only way that cultural democracy can flourish is by promoting a political agenda which offers a democratic challenge to the logic of accumulation.

25. As Alan Finlayson has argued, encouraging the process of self-government seems to be a wider policy goal of New Labour: its ‘vision of the ideal subject is that of the reflexive individual who regards him or her self as a form of capital to be processed, refined and invested. Thus it reveals to us, once again, that part of the innovation of New Labour is to allow economic discourses to flood across categories and come to inform everything. That is what it means to be modern’. See ‘On the subject of New Labour’, in Wendy Wheeler (ed.), *The Political Subject: Essays on the Self from Art, Politics and Science*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 2000), p. 154.

It is the failure to address the political dimensions of social inclusion that most hobbles its liberal critics. Even the most vociferous have proved strikingly unable to offer a viable alternative. The assumption of a return to Keynesian public funding priorities and an Edenic realm of free artistic expression is not only politically inconceivable but also culturally regressive. The advance of private capital into the social sphere has gone too deep to offer up anything but the most minor concessions to the arts. Indeed, as the last two decades have demonstrated, under the pressures of global accumulation, Keynesian solutions (if, indeed, they ever solved anything) are now facing insurmountable crisis.²⁶ It is likely that in the short term at least the public provision of culture will continue to be eroded by the market.²⁷

Most of the critics of social inclusion long to return to a system which privileges the dissemination of dominant cultural forms (the ‘democratisation’ of culture from above), rather than forging a new institutional framework wherein more egalitarian cultural provision could develop and flourish (cultural democracy from below). Under capitalism the cultural terrain is by no means even: an individual’s ability to participate in processes of cultural production and reception is refracted through unequal social and economic relations, including those defined by ethnicity, gender and class. This means paying special attention to the different delineation of cultural practices in relation to a clearly articulated sense of audience. Connecting cultural practice with the political commitment to democratic struggle from below offers a far more progressive model of arts management than the patronising and superficial pluralism of the social inclusion agenda.

Conclusion

Despite the fervour of those who champion it, social inclusion in the arts – and the wider inclusion policy that sustains it – will contribute nothing to the struggle for a truly human culture. If the pursuit of equality in all its forms is contradicted by the logic of globalisation (as employers transfer the costs of competition on to their workforces), then the struggle for cultural democracy means combating the divisive power of capital. But for the proponents of social

26. For the impossibility of neo-Keynesian economic revivalism see István Mészáros, *Beyond Capital*, pp. 625ff.

27. This is seen most strikingly in the recent widescale privatisation of cultural institutions across Europe. For a sense of these developments see Peter B. Boorsma, Annemoon van Hemel and Niki Van der Wielen (eds.), *Privatization and Culture: Experiences in the Arts, Heritage and Cultural Industries in Europe*, (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1998).

inclusion, markets are something to be accommodated to, rather than challenged and fundamentally transformed. As we have seen, the practical ends of the policy are those of incorporating the excluded into the lower regions of the labour force.

In the context of a widening global gulf between rich and poor, social inclusion's far too modest ameliorative measures will bring about little, if any, progressive change. Whatever the complexities of cultural stratification and form, cultural inequality is typically closely linked to economic inequality. Its eradication is absolutely dependent on the just redistribution of wealth and power.

It is one of the ironies of the current situation that many who work in the art world continue to perceive it as a privileged arena which they can occupy for progressive ends. Yet they fail to ask on whose behalf, or on what terms, their occupation takes place. Many of those in managerial roles in the arts in Scotland and beyond serve to uphold the mechanism of false democratisation that works against the wider transformation required to bring about a process of cultural democracy. Facilitating that change certainly requires renewed intellectual nerve and the recovery of a political commitment to defending the public sector. It means rethinking the provision of culture along egalitarian lines. Crucially, it also demands a conscious effort to form bonds of solidarity with the excluded. The next chapter is devoted to a brief examination of the historical conditions which have until now prevented this. We then move on to describe what a programme for cultural democracy might actually begin to look like.

3. History Matters: 'Squeezed Between Art and Commerce'

If the management of culture in Britain over the last fifty years has worked against the interests of cultural democracy, its failures and brief successes nonetheless repay careful scrutiny. As the following overview suggests, the current crisis of cultural provision is the product of an historical process. Although full cultural democracy is impossible under the systemic inequalities generated by capitalism, modest advances have been made towards it, not least during the Second World War and in the wake of the egalitarian struggles of the 1960s. At the level of the state those advances have generally been defeated, a product of a deadening cultural conservatism and political timidity by no means confined to the Tory dominance of post-war British politics. High cultural practices have been overwhelmingly successful in securing state patronage, whilst popular forms are for the most part left to the marketplace, a policy serving to legitimate wider social divisions. When the popular has generated creative resistance, or an enjoyable non-conformity, it has often been subject to legislative intervention, moral panic or bureaucratic 'rationalisation'. As one historian summarises it, during the post-war period democratic culture has been relentlessly 'squeezed between art and commerce'.²⁸

Post-War Settlement and Cold War Pressures

Between 1939 and 1945 the emergency of total war brought both the promise and emerging reality of greater social equality in Britain. The co-operation of the masses required concessions from the powerful and, as Angus Calder has described, the British people were granted a greater role in shaping their future.²⁹ Wealth, too, was conscripted to the war effort, land and essential industries nationalised. Driven on by the hope of a world transformed, a post-war Labour government was elected to provide full employment, universal health care, education, pensions and quality public housing for returning troops. British welfare capitalism flourished.

Wartime conditions and the requirements of morale encouraged new forms of arts

28. Alan Sinfield, 'The Government, the People and the Festival', in Jim Fyrrh (ed.), *Labour's Promised Land?: Culture and Society in Labour Britain 1945-51*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1995), p. 194.

29. *The People's War: Britain 1939-45*, (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1969).

patronage as the state attempted to forge cultural consensus from above. Already attuned to socialist ideals, the intellectuals of the 1930s were mobilised to neutralise pre-war cultural hierarchies which might have threatened the national purpose. A number of institutions – the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, the Army Bureau for Current Affairs – promoted wider access to theatre and music in particular, creating a lively, non-metropolitan network of performances and public lectures. For sympathetic intellectuals keen to promote democratic values in opposition to Nazi populism, the bankruptcy of bourgeois ideas of art became more apparent. In his 1941 pamphlet, *To Hell with Culture*, Herbert Read argued that ‘our capitalist culture is one immense veneer’; the latent sensibility of the worker will ‘only be awakened when meaning is restored to his daily work, and he is allowed to create his own culture’.³⁰ For the South Wales miner and writer, B. L. Coombes, the ivory tower of inter-war high culture was well on the way to collapsing.³¹

The hope that propelled Labour into office in July 1945 was radical and welfare capitalism improved the lives of millions of ordinary people. But Labour policy also took the form of a political compromise, a means of providing for the many without abolishing the exploitative privilege of the few. In the cultural sphere, as in the social and economic, the government failed to support grassroots networks and the next six years saw a gradual and frustrating retrenchment. Looking back, the cultural historian, Raymond Williams, estimated the political costs of Labour’s failure to pursue a more democratic cultural agenda:

I thought that the Labour government had a choice: either for reconstruction of the cultural field in capitalist terms, or for funding institutions of popular education and popular culture that could have withstood the political campaigns in the bourgeois press that were already gathering momentum. In fact, there was a rapid option for conventional capitalist

30. *To Hell with Culture: Democratic Values are New Values*, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1941), p. 49 and p. 46. It is, however, entirely in keeping with the direction of post-war developments that Read should increasingly devote his energies to specialised forms of art education and embrace anarchist politics. See David Goodway (ed.), *Herbert Read Reassessed*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998).

31. ‘Below the tower’, in *Folios of New Writing*, Spring 1941, pp. 30-36. Coombes was one of a number of writers responding to Virginia Woolf’s essay ‘The leaning tower’. For a discussion of the literary politics of the period see Andy Croft, ‘Betrayed Spring: the Labour government and British literary culture’, in *Labour’s Promised Land?*, pp. 197-223.

priorities – the refusal to finance the documentary film movement was an example. I still believe that the failure to fund the working-class movement culturally when the channels of popular education and popular culture were there in the forties became a key factor in the very quick disintegration of Labour’s position in the fifties.³²

During the immediate post-war period the idea was firmly established that it was the province of the state to safeguard the cultural welfare of the nation. But when it was established in 1946, the Arts Council promoted a top-down model of cultural management, supporting professional artistic programmes in a bid widely to disseminate supposedly universal high cultural values. Most of its initial funding went towards establishing opera at Covent Garden: in 1947 it withdrew support from Glasgow’s Unity Theatre in order to sustain London’s West End. The metropolitan middle-class expert became the sole arbiter of cultural value, so much so that in 1952 the Arts Council closed down all of its regional arts centres in order to preserve what it described as ‘a select number of professional undertakings’. With the establishment of its Third Programme, the BBC, too, pursued an elevated cultural purpose – grounded in the modernist experiments of the European avant-garde – that succeeded mainly in alienating its previously captive wartime audiences.³³

By the early 1950s, the traditional edifice of high culture had been wholly resurrected, sustained by funding bodies like the Arts Council and legitimised by the conservative cultural policy of the British state. Doubtless the climate of cultural reaction was politically convenient: the promotion of art as an independent sphere of progress, embodied by the experimentation of the avant-garde, usefully uncoupled culture from the explicit political contest that had been raised under the banner of realism during the 1930s. In 1946, Winston Churchill erected the ‘iron curtain’ across Europe; under Cold War pressures the supposedly autonomous realm of high culture was quickly promoted in both Britain and the United States (not least by the newly formed Central Intelligence Agency) in defence of capitalist economics and ‘free’ expression.³⁴ For Cyril

32. *Politics and Letters: Interviews with New Left Review*, (London: Verso, 1981), pp. 73-74.

33. See Alistair Davies and Alan Sinfield (eds.), *British Culture of the Postwar*, (London: Routledge, 2000). For a history of the Arts Council from the point of view of its relation to the state, see Nicholas Pearson, *The State and the Visual Arts*, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1982).

34. For accounts of British and American culture under the Cold War see Serge Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) and Alan Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, (London: Athlone, 1997). For the influence of the CIA on post-war anglo-american culture see Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: the CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, (London: Granta Books, 1999).

Connolly, the editor of the British literary journal *Horizon*, the public patronage of high culture would elevate art above politics and the marketplace, glorifying both artists and the state. But for Connolly and mandarins like him, the idea of art as a highly specialised individual and institutional practice deliberately worked against broad-based participation. Through *Horizon* he mounted an influential campaign to save avant-gardism and to lead artists away from a politics through which, according to Connolly, they were being 'warped by opposition'. Connolly's campaign proved immensely successful in delivering art to the state and bringing the state into an ideological relationship with art. Institutional conservatism and cultural bohemianism have increasingly privileged middle-class consumers and promoted high cultural networks that discriminate against working people. As the historians of popular culture have emphasised, arts agencies then chastise them for failing to take part. In cultural terms, as in so much else, the post-war British state has only ever been partially equivalent to its people.

Collapsing Consensus and the Rise of Corporate Culture

In 1947, £114 million was spent annually on advertising in Britain; by 1960 it had grown to four times that amount. The post-war consumer boom accelerated during the 1960s, marked by the rise of a well-salaried middle class and an expansion of professional and commercial provision across all cultural sectors. Although the experience of poverty diminished with the establishment of the welfare state, the wealth gap was much the same in 1965 as it had been a decade earlier. At the same time, the Labour Party, when in power, showed little interest in recovering its lost commitment to wartime equality. At the level of the state, cultural democracy received scant support and the Arts Council continued its paternalistic doctrine of 'raise and spread', with a distinct emphasis on the former side of the equation.

During the 1960s, expanding accumulation also fuelled a reaction to the triviality and distance of leisure-class culture. Mass cultural forms – music, television and cinema in particular – offered working-class youth a chance to look beyond their own experiences to fabricate counter-identities, often rebelliously, on the fringes of bourgeois expansion. The role of subcultures in expressing dissent has been widely celebrated by intellectuals, their work in undermining the specious universality of traditional cultural values accorded a political significance all their own.³⁵ Similarly, the efforts by the state to suppress or curb popular

35. See, for example, Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*, (London: Methuen, 1979). For an important recent critique of the legacy of cultural studies see Francis Mulhern, 'Beyond metaculture', *New Left Review*, 16, July/August 2002, pp. 86-104.

culture in the name of more 'rational' amusements – community centres, youth groups, voluntary organisations – has been exposed.³⁶ But the story of popular dissent is also the reality of uninterrupted commercial growth in which the taste for change is regularly substituted by a change of taste. Whatever its creative force, the politics of style has either been neutralised by the state or incorporated into the marketplace. This effort to 'rationalise' popular activities – the tradition in which social inclusion programmes operate – or to offer them up to more respectable forms of commerce, has worked on the whole to negate the democratic impact of a people's culture. As we emphasise below, the successes of a dissenting cultural politics, working organically within and between communities, have proved to be exceptions rather than the rule.

The brief emergence of democratically-inspired cultural programmes from the late 1960s was fully reversed by the coming of the Thatcher government in 1979 as it moved to reduce public subsidies and return the management of the arts to the guardianship of elites. The theatre director, John McGrath, described the shutdown of radical projects during the early 1980s, a process that he argued began under a Labour administration in 1976:

The source of funding and guidance for most of the new theatre work of the 70s, the Arts Council, was gutted from top to bottom, and left, gutless, in the life-extinguishing grip of the then Sir William Rees-Mogg. The whole blossoming bough of popular theatre, which was all set to achieve so much for British theatre, was clumsily hacked off. Ideological repression and fiscal misery combined to change the geography of the arts.³⁷

In 1980, the Arts Council's funding was reduced for the first time in its history (it was cut again in 1983) and the need to stimulate private sponsorship began to dominate the rhetoric of arts agencies and politicians. In 1979, the Tory Arts Minister, Norman St. John Stevas, wearily demanded that the art world 'accept the fact that government policy in general has decisively tilted away from expansion of the public to the enlargement of the private sector'. The Labour Party in opposition, particularly under Neil Kinnock, could only concur, offering few policies in support of cultural democracy.

36. Callum G. Brown, 'Popular culture and the continuing struggle for rational recreation', in T. M. Devine and R. J. Finlay (eds.), *Scotland in the Twentieth Century*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 210-29.

37. *The Bone Won't Break: on Theatre and Hope in Hard Times*, (London: Methuen, 1990), p. viii.

Having neutralised its radical edge, the Thatcher regime slowly warmed to the arts, attracted by its capacity to generate revenue through the service sector in an economy whose manufacturing base had been decimated. In 1985, the British Tourist Board printed a leaflet claiming that ‘the arts are to Britain what the sun is to Spain’, heralding the importance of cultural tourism to an ailing post-industrial economy. (Its promise was seemingly fulfilled in the 1990s by the packaged spectacle of Britart.) At the same time, the post-war ethic of administrative amateurism was slowly displaced by arts administrators with university degrees and business backgrounds. Arts bureaucracies – not to mention hierarchies – grew commensurably.

The apparent expansion of arts provision over the last two decades has achieved nothing for cultural democracy – quite the reverse. A managerial revolution, grounded in the life experiences of the middle class, has retained the top-down character of cultural provision – and with it the numbing specialisms, institutional ambition and political vacuity of professionalised staff. The spectacle of culture (which they do little to disrupt) and the logic of the expanding accumulation which sustains it, means that cultural inequality is more pronounced today than at any previous point in post-war British history.

It is important to emphasise how deep into social life these fundamentally anti-democratic processes now extend. Faced since the early 1970s with the effects of de-industrialisation under the pressures of globalisation, cultural projects have become crucial to urban regeneration and a significant force in privatising the public sector. Here ‘partnership’ is the principal mode of government action, often invoked as part of the drive to increase the ‘competitiveness’ of the public sector, but in fact granting ever larger sums of public money to corporations and private interests. For urban regenerators, politics – the necessary foundation of cultural democracy – amounts to a failure of their ideal of ‘true partnership’ and they have been keen to limit democratic dissent within their promotional apparatus.³⁸ (They also fail to examine the anti-democratic history of ‘governing by cultures’, the roots of which lie in fascism and in particular Italian corporatism.)³⁹ However, as a number of geographers have argued, so-called ‘creative cities’ tend only to promote social division as the poor are dispersed to the urban margins. The vogue for new urban arts venues

38. See Franco Bianchini and Michael Parkinson (eds.), *Cultural Policy and Urban Regeneration: the West European Experience*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) and Charles Landry and Franco Bianchini, *The Creative City*, (London: Demos, 1995).

39. For a definition of corporatism and further discussion see the Conclusion below.

privileges the tastes of a managerial class and does little to resolve problems of structural inequality.⁴⁰ In the face of this ghettoisation, the theory and practice of cultural policy-makers have been totally inadequate. Too often their response is to promote what has been termed ‘attitudinal progression’ through training connected to arts activities, producing amenable individuals for a deregulated knowledge economy.⁴¹ The ideal urban citizen tacitly adopts artistic creativity as a model for personal change. Politics are abandoned as an imaginative force or source of social transformation.

Searching for a Democratic Space

During the 1960s and 1970s, politicised cultural producers began to look beyond the state and the arenas of the art world in order to claim public space for more democratic cultural programmes. Whilst some of this activity involved resituating existing cultural forms, other egalitarian practices aimed to place the tools of artistic production in the hands of people for emancipatory ends. Such projects were often connected to radical thinking about education, most especially the writing of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. In Scotland, John McGrath’s play, *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, provides an example of a democratic practice that refuted the cosy modernist settlement established between artists and the state in the post-war period.

Begun in 1973, McGrath’s play was dependent on a lengthy process of research and grassroots audience development, with its first work-in-progress performance viewed by a mixed audience of 450 people. Its significance in political and dramatic terms was achieved, in the words of McGrath, not ‘because we’d been “good” or “clever” – but because what we were struggling to say was what they, and the masses of people in Scotland, wanted said. Now’.⁴² In the face of contemporary fragmentation it is difficult to envisage such a claim being made today. For McGrath, politics informed the organic circumstances of the play’s production, not just its subject-matter. It is precisely this question of cultural *praxis*, involving structural issues and the ideological relations underpinning cultural provision, that has been marginalised by contemporary market-driven urban regeneration and social inclusion policy.

40. See in particular David Harvey, *The Urban Experience*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989) and Steve Pile et. al. (eds.), *Unruly Cities?*, (London: Routledge, 1999).

41. Quoted in Edinburgh Arts and Social Inclusion Forum *Newsletter*, September 2003.

42. John McGrath, ‘The year of the Cheviot’, in *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981), p. v.

Today, the activity that stems from a tradition of cultural democracy has not died out, although its political scope is much reduced. Ground Zero in Canada utilise performance and the media to highlight healthcare issues; Augusto Boal's Legislative Theatre involves the Brazilian people in a dialogical process to inform and challenge the law. The Kids of Survival in New York demonstrate forms of liberation that become possible through engagement with Freirian educational processes. Most recently many artists and musicians have identified with the anti-war movement, discovering and creating new audiences. However, in a climate where the goals of neoliberal cultural policy focus on 'partnership' with the marketplace, cultural practices that threaten corporatist ideology through a long-term political engagement struggle to succeed. The photography collective, Camerawork, was not the only grassroots organisation to dissipate its political energies during the course of the 1980s.⁴³

Many progressive cultural producers continue to seek out a democratic space free from corporatism and its appropriation of cultural meaning. It is precisely this form of domination that has led bands like Negativland in the United States or Chumbawamba in Britain to refuse lucrative promotional deals with companies seeking to appropriate their cult status for marketing purposes.⁴⁴ However, the anti-corporate politics that drives the work of these and other groups has very little presence in the public sector. Indeed, whilst some aspects of popular music have fought against the tide of the marketplace, a privileged avant-gardism in the public sector – not least in the realm of art – functions as little more than a 'think tank' for selling. But as a number of critics – Walter Benjamin in the 1930s and more recently Frederic Jameson – have argued, a 'higher' art cannot hope to exist free from the politics of economic domination and inequality. It is only through an open acknowledgement of this problematic that a democratic culture might emerge within the public sector in the interests of the population as a whole.

Conclusion

Since the Second World War, the potential of cultural democracy has been steadily eroded, furthered by the privatisation of most forms of social experience and the inability of cultural managers to imagine, or fight for, a life-affirming

43. For an account of Camerawork's activities see Jessica Evans (ed.), *The Camerawork Essays*, (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1997).

44. Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, (London: Flamingo, 2001).

alternative to the alienating practices of the art world. The historical gerrymandering of resources towards the leisure culture of the middle and upper classes means that art forms have evolved in separation from broad-based constituencies, often generating an autonomy of dubious value. One example of the scarring effects of such sustained separation is the way that visual art has institutionalised its own contestation, promoting attenuated formal or conceptual practices and rarefied conceptions of authorship. The public arena of creative communication is displaced by a realm of increasingly privatised and specialised visual codes, often unfathomable, or irrelevant, to the majority.

With the rise of a mass-mediated society and the continued privilege of the realm of high culture, socialist politics in Britain has too often sunk into nostalgia for an 'authentic' working-class culture or community expression. However, during the 1930s, Walter Benjamin began to sketch out a socialist programme of cultural provision that would prise the production and distribution network from the ruling class. His challenge remains important for progressive cultural workers today: without a political effort to democratise cultural structures individual creative energies will ultimately have 'no other social function than that of continually extracting new effects or sensations ... for the public's entertainment'. To Benjamin's mind this amounted to the position of the 'hack', resulting in a creative environment in which few material or political interests could be revealed.⁴⁵ With channels of cultural distribution controlled by a handful of media moguls and grassroots cultural programmes reduced in the name of an impossible consensus, Benjamin's criticisms may be even more relevant today. In Scotland, as elsewhere, the most meaningful alternative lies in the democratisation of the whole cultural apparatus.

45. 'The author as producer', reprinted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 483-89.

4. Towards Cultural Democracy

The distribution of cultural resources in Britain since the Second World War has been substantially unequal, privileging middle-class consumers and acting against the cultural expression, as well as the wider social and economic interests, of the working class, minority groups and women. Although the existence of broad-based and systemic cultural injustice is now recognised by some cultural workers and politicians, the programmes formulated to address it are unlikely to achieve their goal. As we argued in an earlier chapter, social inclusion works mainly to incorporate the poor and unemployed into the lower regions of the labour force, offering little explanation for the structural causes of their domination. As a top-down model of cultural provision it often chooses to 'democratise' high culture, rather than explore the mobilisation of cultural resources from below. In its refusal to address the links between cultural and economic injustice, social inclusion policy is rarely a resource for the dispossessed to confront – and thus work collectively to overcome – oppression. As such, it fails to offer any coherent idea of how a broad, rather than simply token, redistribution of cultural resources is to be achieved.

In this chapter we propose a different policy, one we describe as a programme for cultural democracy. In what follows we look specifically at sites, and consider cultural practices, through which the struggle for cultural democracy can be engaged. This means specifically focusing on public sector institutions – libraries for example – and arguing that their existing functions need to be extended and fought for. Keeping public sector institutions like libraries out of the mercenary grasp of the privateers is already to engage in a struggle for redistribution, one that offers significant cultural potential. This in turn points to the importance of exploring further the links between cultural and economic inequality and recognising that remedying cultural injustices inevitably involves a struggle on both fronts. As Nancy Fraser has argued, cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect invariably involve economic and political inequities. The cultural aspects of racism and sexism, for example, are in part generated by the capitalist division of labour and a lack of equality before the law. In Fraser's terms, they 'reinforce each other dialectically'.⁴⁶ A serious policy of cultural diversity,

46. *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the 'Postsocialist' Condition*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 15.

therefore, must move beyond a superficial pluralism to challenge the political and economic roots of cultural domination.

This inevitably raises wider questions of political programme and agency that are too complex to deal with fully here. The decline, through privatisation, of the public sector, the collapse of our ecosystem and the fact that the global limits of accumulation have been reached make socialist politics – and an accompanying programme of cultural democracy – questions of utmost urgency. If cultural democracy is to confront cultural inequality it can only do so alongside a politics that places the struggle for social and economic justice at its heart. For now, we outline strategic interventions that can be made within the existing social fabric and to that extent our programme is a transitional one. We believe that there are gains to be won now for cultural democracy, but those gains will necessarily, in the short-term at least, be incomplete.

Finally, despite the programmatic emphasis of what follows, we wish to underline the importance of working with the poor and dispossessed to construct cultural programmes on their terms and in their interests. There is no other way for progressive cultural policy to proceed. The writings of Paulo Freire exemplify how to pursue cultural practice alongside, rather than on behalf of, the oppressed. Cultural provision is never neutral; it either works in the interests of the exploiters, or it becomes what Freire terms a ‘practice of freedom’ helping the poor critically and creatively to transform their world. This means constructing cultural projects which respect the world view of those involved – anything else amounts to an act of ‘cultural invasion’:

We must never merely discourse on the present situation, must never provide the people with programs which have little or nothing to do with their own preoccupations, doubts, hopes, and fears – programs which at times in fact increase the fears of the oppressed consciousness. It is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours. We must realize that their view of the world, manifested variously in their action, reflects their situation in the world.⁴⁷

47. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 77.

In his insistence on the situated character of progressive cultural practice, on the actions of the oppressed as subjects of transformation, Freirian method is inevitably engaged in a politics of transition. In its emphasis on dialogue as a means to liberation it offers a vital alternative to the manipulative and controlling logic of social inclusion. Any encounter between cultural workers and the marginalised on these terms involves an openness about the political relations governing participation, and about the material and symbolic interests of the institutions and agencies involved. The human destruction wrought by the structural inequalities social inclusion seeks to obscure underpins the very nature of the policy; the politics of dispossession frame every effort to gain grassroots participation and should be fully explained. An agenda for cultural democracy begins with the demand that the contested politics of social inclusion be clearly outlined to all participants and that alternative policies and cultural imperatives be explored.

Siting Cultural Democracy

The fight for a programme for cultural democracy depends on developing a cultural network within the public sector. The aim will be to replace the top-down policies of market-led regeneration and social inclusion's token co-option of the marginalised with an agenda promoting democratic participation and communication. In what follows we examine a few of the key sites and issues through which this process might be engaged.

Established Institutions

Cultural institutions receiving high levels of public funding are under pressure to demonstrate wider appeal, in part through the promotion of 'socially inclusive' programming. A typical response to this pressure has been the fashion for spectacular urban venues, as well as populist and often costly exhibition projects, raising questions about the growing dominance of commercial interests in public sector cultural provision.⁴⁸ Outreach programmes with more specifically educational agendas have a lower public profile. They are generally underfinanced and rarely develop over a sustained period. In institutional terms, their main function is to allow the ticking of boxes on funding applications and auditors' reports. In this way, institutions make minor adjustments to the

48. See Chin-tao Wu, *Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention since the 1980s*, (London: Verso, 2003).

demographic patterns of their audiences and, less often, the cultural producers or staff they employ.

The tokenism of outreach projects can be challenged on a number of fronts, including inequalities of evaluation. Whilst major artistic productions are judged on the basis of press coverage, audience popularity or critical reception and debate, outreach projects are evaluated by the learning experience of participants exposed, it is assumed, to 'worthy' forms of cultural endeavour. For most social inclusion projects the aim is to translate this experience into low-level employment opportunities.

However, this raises a number of problems. First, the learning experience in the arts has little or no testable value in people's lives. The majority of those who undertake even a professional training in the arts fail to find jobs in their particular fields; arts-related training opportunities have very low practical value. If, however, a qualitative experience of the arts is being promoted, then it is reasonable to expect that its evaluation should be equally qualitative. In this case, outreach programmes would merit long-term support, offering groups and individuals full institutional status through paid participation. Instead of patronising participants and treating them as if they were undergoing a process of life-changing enlightenment, outreach would become integral to institutional life. Through sustained programmes, allowing the full development of any creative process, projects could be properly validated. Their public outcomes – in the form of exhibition, publication or performance etc. – would be treated in the same critical terms as any other cultural product.

The democratisation of established cultural institutions could proceed on any number of fronts. New forms of interpretation could be employed (for example, replacing a class-bound connoisseurship with more critical visual histories) and management structures made more accountable (trustees could be appointed by representative panels independent from government and their meetings held in public). New employment procedures could be put in place so staff expertise reflected more equitably the cultural interests and social make-up of the population. Generally, we would argue for a procedure of 'full disclosure', allowing the incursion of managerialism and market values in public sector institutions to be properly scrutinised and reversed.⁴⁹ In the case of art galleries, such procedural openness might include a public debate about the relation of a fetishised notion of 'art' to the wider meanings and uses of visual culture.

49. Mark Rectanus highlights this strategy in his *Culture Incorporated: Museums, Artists and Corporate Sponsorships*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

Libraries

A more direct and geographically expansive programme would involve the extension of existing library services and the building of new libraries as multi-purpose cultural centres. Libraries could house travelling exhibitions and stage related activities such as discussions, concerts and workshops. They could also provide a range of more practical services for communities – crèches, citizens' advice bureaux or meeting spaces, for example. Historically, libraries have been sites for self-education where people have pursued knowledge that the school system has been unable to deliver. However, today's libraries are far from democratic spaces, used only by about thirty per cent of the population and dominated by white, middle-class constituencies. As a librarian in the Information for Social Change organisation puts it, 'libraries are used most by those who need them least; and they are used least by those who need them most'.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, libraries are firmly established in the public sector and rejuvenating their functioning as public spaces is vital if their progressive potential is to be defended against the threat of privatisation. Indeed, there is already a significant contest under way over who will deliver library services and what form they should take. Under pressure from the World Trade Organisation and the General Agreement on Trade in Services, public libraries across the globe are steadily being privatised. In Britain, the consultancy-driven 'Best Value' regime recommends increasing commercial involvement in libraries and the reduction of their public functions through computerisation. The danger is that libraries will become the domain of an even narrower section of the population. Spurred on by the so-called 'communications revolution', the best democracy money can buy for an ailing library network may turn out to be precious little democracy at all.

Information for Social Change argues for a greater diversity of functions to be provided through libraries and a democratisation of their management. Stocking policy must be more responsive to public needs; opening hours should be extended so libraries can be used as meeting places and social centres. But whilst a more accountable role for librarians is important if library stock is to become more relevant, this measure of democratisation alone seems unlikely to boost library use. Free access to knowledge in the public sector is best defended through a programme of expansion. A vital, but underused public service could be rejuvenated by a wider strategy, offering a range of cultural activities to a diverse public without crowding those activities, as they so often are now, in a few city-centre sites. With a renewed political commitment to the public sector, libraries

50. The Information for Social Change web site and journal is available at <http://www.libr.org.ISC>.

could provide the basis for a democratic cultural network that would reduce the concentration of contemporary art venues in urban areas serving tiny, in-crowd audiences.

Beyond Cultural Diversity

Recently, the discourse of social inclusion has been augmented by the commitment to cultural diversity, a commitment forced on institutions by legislative authority. However, the language of cultural diversity is little more than a discourse in the service of neoliberalism, infusing procedure in the policy arena to generate politically conservative and superficial outcomes.

Cultural diversity is promoted as a process whose goal is not clearly defined, but appears to be a form of assimilation. The burden of this multiculturalism is constantly placed on the marginalised. In recent years, for example, there has been a growth in the spectacle of community festivals, funded mainly for their supposed role in combating racism. But do such festivals really challenge racism? In parts of England, the British National Party courts Sikh communities in an attempt to forge alliances against local Muslims. Across Europe, the fascist right is re-articulating its politics in apparently more liberal terms. Instead of using discredited racial or cultural criteria, the far right concentrates more on the segregation of the economic experiences produced under global capitalism. (Thus British fascists have spoken in support of the Iraq war by naming the oppression of the Kurds whilst simultaneously victimising Kurdish refugees whom they accuse of being economic migrants.) These shifts represent a qualitative development in fascist politics.⁵¹ However, whilst the right is becoming more specific about who it seeks to segregate, and how it seeks to achieve it, Third Way politics has only been vague about the terms of its opposition to segregation.⁵²

Ethnic festivals are often devoid of the very qualities that make a good festival. Drawing on a policy that seeks to contain cultural difference, they are narrowly focused and sanitised. In part because of the bureaucratic frameworks that generate them, community ethnic events tend to be dominated by the

51. See David Renton, 'Examining the success of the British National Party, 1999-2003', *Race and Class*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2003, pp. 75-85.

52. Vague, and in some cases, actively cruel. With the Asylum and Immigration acts of 1999 and 2002 New Labour instituted voucher systems, dispersal policies and employment bans for asylum-seekers. For an account of New Labour's immigration policies see Nick Cohen, *Pretty Straight Guys*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), pp. 51-80.

preferences of the first generation gerontocracy whose memory is often supportive of romantic and conservative cultural values. Whilst ethnic festivals make an apparently multicultural society tangible at grassroots level, they do little to enable communication between different immigrant groups. Moreover, they tend to mask the political chasm left by the decline of the public sector. In its place 'community partnerships' flourish and solidarity in the face of capital is supplanted by the top-down orchestration of positive community identities. But progressive values cannot be realised in such a vacuum. Multiculturalism becomes a deceptive notion when structural inequalities, nationally and globally, continue to generate divided societies.⁵³

The effects of globalisation are complex and the terms of cultural stratification and economic hierarchy have shifted dramatically in recent decades. Whilst celebrating cultural difference, Western consumer society increasingly denies the immigrant a genuine sense of belonging. Nowadays, if consumer sovereignty is the only sovereignty that matters, the immigrant – often unable to make meaningful market choices – is more than ever likely to experience citizenship as a meaningless imposition. Under escalating regimes of consumption, the discourse of citizenship is less able to combat the experience of social and economic marginalisation.

The current mobilisation of cultural diversity expresses the relationship between the centre and the margins, a relationship embedded in the increasing monopolisation of wealth and power. This political reality is denied in the way cultural diversity is packaged. In its present form, cultural diversity is either a celebratory parade of bounded ethnic forms, or their hybrid assimilation. This management of cultural difference negates an understanding of migration as something which stems from unequal control over the global marketplace, involving the causes and consequences of the uneven distribution of wealth.

The relationships ignored by cultural diversity are those that exist between different immigrant groups. The tensions between, and within, immigrant groups are as important as those between immigrant and indigenous populations. Power, which needs to be critically examined in any discussion of cultural diversity, is expressed in the ongoing experience of migration and the implications of that experience for 'mainstream' culture. Such a critical engagement leads us away

53. See Brian Barry, *Culture and Inequality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001) and Slavoj Žižek, 'Multiculturalism, or, the cultural logic of multinational capitalism', *New Left Review*, 225, September/October 1997, pp. 28-51.

from the tamely instrumental celebration of ethnic identity as an end in itself. A culturally democratic agenda would accept the legacies of imperialism and recognise the effects of economic rule today. The tendency to think of immigrant cultures as self-contained and internally coherent when they are, in fact, as contradictory and multi-faceted as any other, places a burden on everyone. It especially tests those with responsibility for enabling cultural frameworks beyond the existing implementation of diversity agendas.

In the current context of diversity engineering, the 'minority ethnic' is constituted as a niche market for cultural production. The overriding argument against this is that cultural inclusiveness, by stressing difference without an open engagement with complexities of migration, heightens the politics of race. It does so at the expense of a culture of immigration. It is through a critical engagement with the politics and histories of immigration that communities can begin openly to acknowledge internal differences and also treat other immigrants with less suspicion.

Histories of migration always contain within them the experience of cultural difference, but the experience of diversity does not always reveal the meanings of immigration. It is only through a greater sense of human presence that immigrant populations might participate in a broader culture, rather than receiving the tokens of mainstream tolerance. This raises the question of how such networks of representation might be achieved, a question that can only be resolved in an open manner impossible under present-day multicultural agendas.

The Mass Media

Today's mass media is a powerful mechanism of social control engaged in 'manufacturing consent' on behalf of the powerful.⁵⁴ During the 1980s, British television companies merged with larger corporations, lobbied government for legislative deregulation and increasingly fell into the hands of commercial and conservative interests whose chief concern is connecting audiences with advertisers. As a result of ratings pressures, documentaries and public service broadcasts diminished and innovative programming declined. Under the influence of Thatcherite managerialism, the BBC, a public sector broadcaster, also submitted to market forces suffering a parallel reduction in the quality and breadth of its programming. In the words of one writer, over the last two decades

54. Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: the Political Economy of the Mass Media*, (London: Vintage, 1994).

broadcasting in Britain has been reconstituted 'as a field of accumulation, rather than a set of primarily political institutions'.⁵⁵ A multiplication of channels has been accompanied by audience fragmentation and an intense concentration of media ownership, a process damaging to both democracy and free speech. By cosying up to the Murdoch empire and with the corporate bias of the 2003 Communications Act, the Blair regime has shown scant concern to regulate broadcasting in the public, rather than the commercial, interest.⁵⁶ It is as consumers, rather than citizens, that we are increasingly subject to a barrage of formulaic programming.

However, as a number of critics have noted, capitalist states have always refused fully to democratise mass-mediated arenas so that people might be able to intervene in the cultural processes that dominate their lives.⁵⁷ Any agenda for cultural democracy must confront this refusal – there can be little democracy until people control their own communications. One immediate solution lies in the generation of an autonomous popular network of communication protected from the market populism that the BBC is no longer able to contain. Greg Dyke's recent outburst against government 'bullshit' – the policies by which American media companies will be permitted to buy up Britain's commercial channels – is an indication of the strength of the forces now arrayed against public sector broadcasting. The whole apparatus of popular representation and communication is being slowly abandoned to the market. This dangerous democratic gulf could be filled by the establishment of constitutionally protected broadcasting networks providing people's access to programme-making. Digital technology has now made broadcast-standard production, cameras and computer editing more widely accessible. But a democratic forum in which these tools might be put to use by the general public has been withheld. Currently, the only response to this vacuum has arisen in the marketplace with the rise of highly controlled, yet apparently

55. Colin Leys, *Market-Driven Politics: Neoliberal Democracy and the Public Interest*, (London: Verso, 2001), p. 136. Leys presents a detailed description of the marketisation of British broadcasting over recent years, pp. 108-64.

56. Julian Petley, 'Consumers or citizens? Re-regulating communications', *Radical Philosophy*, no. 120, 2003, pp. 7-10. Other useful recent analyses include Robert McChesney, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999) and Gillian Doyle, *Media Ownership*, (London: Sage, 2002).

57. See especially Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 'Constituents of a theory of the media', *New Left Review*, no. 64, 1970, pp. 14-23 and Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1975).

spontaneous, 'reality television'.⁵⁸

As Bertolt Brecht argued during the 1930s, there is no technical reason why centralised systems of broadcast distribution should not be transformed into networks of democratic communication, a transition that would help mobilise the vulnerable and reign in the powerful.⁵⁹ In the United States and Holland, community television and radio stations have enhanced informed interaction within localities and potentially offer ways of challenging the acute centralisation of media power. The process of creating digital media collectively in whatever form builds knowledge and encourages self-reliance. It fosters a critical scrutiny of subject-matter which is both personally expressive and socially communicative. Populations that gain the ability to communicate local experience through democratic media networks are more likely to learn to direct social change, rather than be overwhelmed by it. It is this power of collective self-representation that digital technology can unleash.

Community media as currently constituted, however, is not necessarily a democratising force. Recent developments have tended to instrumentalise and ghettoise community provision, not least by compelling participants to operate according to a top-down social policy framework (including social inclusion). More often than not, discourses of access and participation – incorrectly articulated as 'community initiatives' – work to conceal what one writer describes as 'the institutional conditions of access and the political limits of coming to voice'.⁶⁰ Such rhetoric tends to depoliticise community activity by attributing problems to the character failings of individuals, thus directing attention away from the contribution of structural factors. In this way community media institutes access without invigorating collective agency; it encourages self-surveillance, rather than transforming the institutional relations of power and knowledge. Following the logic of communitarian politics, community television's apparent decentralisation of the media in reality offers little to those in communities wishing to combat social

58. For an analysis of the issues raised here see Mike Wayne, 'Surveillance and class in Big Brother', *Radical Philosophy*, no. 117, 2003, pp. 34-42 and Richard Kilborn, *Staging the Real: Factual TV Programming in the Age of 'Big Brother'*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

59. 'The radio as an apparatus of communication', 1932, reprinted in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 615-16.

60. Janine Marchessault, 'Reflections on the dispossessed: video and the "Challenge for Change" experiment', *Screen*, vol. 36, no. 2, 1995, pp. 143-44.

fragmentation.⁶¹

If community television and radio are to develop in a way that offers a serious challenge to corporate media culture they will require dedicated local and national networks within the public sector offering an extended and dynamic orbit of popular representation. Such networks must be constitutionally secured and protected from commercial forces, with their regulatory bodies, content and bureaucracy governed by participants. The costs of training and production would be met by central and local government with funding secured on a long-term basis, perhaps in the first instance by an extra levy raised on advertising. The flourishing of access television in America before it was quashed by the right during the 1980s provides a useful model to build on – it certainly proves that an interactive network is technically feasible.⁶² With a dedicated terrestrial presence, such channels would be afforded the same opportunities currently available to public sector and commercial broadcasters – billboard advertising spaces, for example. In this way community media would be transformed into a public service broadcasting network in the service of citizenship.

Historically, the British left has paid comparatively little attention to reforming the structures of the most important constituent of the consciousness industry – television.⁶³ Doubtless this is in part due to the comparative quality of public sector broadcasting during the immediate post-war period. The current decline of the BBC makes this a good time to reinvigorate debate about what a fully democratised public broadcasting system might look like. Certainly, this requires a firmer definition of what constitutes the public interest – the redistribution of wealth and power, the extension of democracy – and how this might be furthered through mass mediation. A new wave of organisation in socialist media is vital if we are to turn back the dominant capitalist (and New Labour) philosophy of broadcasting – that of deregulation.

61. Communitarianism is central to New Labour thinking. However, whilst communitarian policies appear to have some continuity with socialism, they are usually at odds with the solidarity that arose historically as working people recognised their common interests and the necessity of forming the widest alliances against capitalism. This critical knowledge remains essential for the social and environmental politics urgently required today. In our experience, communitarian policies negate the creation of solidarity by promoting a parochial sphere of action that is almost wholly dependent on professionalised community organisations. Indeed, greater inequality and declining prospects accrue a positive spin through being associated with a campaigning community spirit and self help. Communitarian policies also often engender a competitive spirit between disenfranchised people based in different localities and in this respect they work against critical socialist knowledge and alliances.

62. Douglas Kellner, *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*, (Boulder: Westview Press Inc., 1990), pp. 207ff.

63. One notable exception here is the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. See its web site at <http://www.cpbf.org.uk>.

Conclusion

This chapter has sketched out a few proposals for cultural democracy, focusing on issues that we feel are currently particularly compelling. There are, of course, many other sites and questions worth discussing: the founding of a network of public sector recording studios, the limits of ‘community’ theatre, cultural provision for the disabled, the structure and functions of Britain’s arts councils, the potential of the web, the generalised privatisation of global information, the reform of humanities’ curricula in universities and art schools, to name only a few. The complex issue of a fully democratised media realm is of central importance – there is unlikely to be substantial progress towards cultural democracy without it.

However, thinking in terms of cultural democracy – and the political conditions that might realistically sustain it – is already a powerful weapon for cultural workers and we would encourage the readers of this pamphlet to contribute to this discussion through our web site. Arguments for cultural democracy expose the incoherence of social inclusion policy and the fact that cultural and social inequality can never be reduced by enhancing an individual’s capacity to compete in the market. They also raise the crucial question of political agency – the necessity of redistribution, the extension of democracy and the constituencies involved in a repositioning of socialist strategy. It is to these difficult problems that we turn briefly by way of conclusion.

5. Conclusion

Today, social inclusion in the arts is a policy in crisis. Rejected or ignored by its target populations, it is enacted only in token form by the bureaucracies which sustain it. It has become entangled in the contradictions of wider social policy and in the unequal distribution of resources which it can do nothing to resolve. Indeed, with social exclusion showing few signs of disappearing there are reports that New Labour in Scotland is gradually abandoning the policy, replacing it with more punitive measures.⁶⁴ Certainly, social inclusion can do nothing to halt the social and environmental devastation which neoliberal economics now universally impose.⁶⁵

In this pamphlet we have argued for a combination of policies to enhance the democratic control of cultural provision, combining a reallocation of existing resources with an extensive programme of public investment to produce more diffused and accountable cultural networks. Central to this is the democratisation of the media realm, a topic – as the Hutton affair has demonstrated – of pressing importance. At the heart of our proposals lies a deepening and widening of democratic procedures within the cultural sphere, an argument that takes us far beyond the modest, managerial tinkering of those who propose only superficially to democratise existing cultural institutions.⁶⁶ At a time when social democracy is suffering a terminal legitimisation crisis, the extension of democracy is a vital political task, not least so that the whole gamut of state and commercial manipulation may be countered by an informed, popular will. This pamphlet is itself a symptom of a mounting democratic deficit – one of its functions has been to reference a body of knowledge relating to social inclusion that has either been informally censored by arts managers, or simply ignored. Such unquestioning adherence to the technocratic logic of a top-down cultural policy displaces the interests of a wider citizenry.

64. 'Executive "dumps inclusion policy"', *Sunday Herald*, 18 January 2004, p. 6.

65. See Minqi Li, 'After neoliberalism: empire, social democracy, or socialism?', *Monthly Review*, January 2004, pp. 21-36. As he writes, 'the world's richest 1 percent receive as much income as the poorest 57 percent. The income gap between the richest 20 percent and the poorest 20 percent in the world rose from 30:1 in 1960, to 60:1 in 1990, and to 74:1 in 1999, and is projected to reach 100:1 in 2015. In 1999-2000, 2.8 billion people lived on less than \$2 a day, 840 million were undernourished, 2.4 billion did not have access to any form of improved sanitation services, and one in every six children in the world of primary school age were not in school. About 50 percent of the global nonagricultural labor force is estimated to be either unemployed or underemployed' (p. 21). The article is available at <http://www.monthlyreview.org/0104li.htm>.

66. Most recently Richard Sandell, 'Social inclusion, the museum and the dynamics of sectoral change', *Museum and Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2003, pp. 45-62, at <http://www.le.ac.uk/ms/m&s/mands4.pdf>.

Culture and Britain's Enfeebled Democracy

In a recent article, Susan Watkins has charted the dramatic collapse of democratic accountability under New Labour, a collapse which cannot easily be wished away by positing a wealthy and contented populace. The facts are worth quoting in full:

In absolute terms, Labour's popular vote of 10.7 million in 2001 was well down even on the 11.5 million that saw Kinnock defeated in 1992. Fewer than one voter in four (24 percent of the total electorate) actually marked a cross for Blair's government, while turnout fell from a (then) record low of 71 per cent in 1997 to a mere 59 per cent in 2001. Unrepresented in parliament are the 2.8 million Labour abstentions in Britain's former industrial heartlands – the metropolitan conurbations of Tyne and Wear, Manchester, Merseyside, the West Midlands, Clydeside and South Wales. It was the hard-core Labour vote that stayed at home: whites in the old colliery districts, Asians in the Lancashire inner cities, under-25s in particular. Turnout fell below 44 per cent in the blighted constituencies round the Tyneside shipyards, the bleak Glaswegian council estates and the semi-derelict terraces of Salford and central Leeds; below 35 per cent in the ruined zones of Liverpool's docklands. Measured in terms of working-class disenfranchisement, the Americanization of British politics has accelerated dramatically under New Labour, to abstention levels worthy of the US itself.⁶⁷

In the May 2003 elections for the Scottish Parliament – reflecting the discontent amongst Labour's traditional constituency – turnout was less than fifty per cent, the lowest figure since 1852.

Social inclusion policy has done little, if anything, to reverse the grand scale of contemporary disenfranchisement, an indication of its acute shortcomings, not least when it comes to relieving poverty and increasing popular accountability.

67. 'A weightless hegemony: New Labour's role in the neoliberal order', *New Left Review*, 25, January/February 2004, p. 6.

Indeed, there is little evidence that New Labour wants to respond to this crisis of working-class representation at all, preferring instead to gerrymander the popular vote, reportedly by installing an electoral system that results in the exclusion of growing minority parties – mainly Socialists and Greens – from the Scottish Parliament.⁶⁸ Obviously, this raises questions of socialist political strategy which we cannot deal with in detail here. For now we wish to emphasise that a programme for cultural democracy, in tandem with other measures, would help amend this democratic deficit, not least by returning cultural practices of all kinds – including networks of broadcast communication – to the social roots from which they are being systematically prised. Democracy needs to be deepened and strengthened in all directions, admitting a range of voices, including many with which we would disagree. This process is particularly vital for those who have historically been marginalised by mainstream society – their material interests need to be addressed beyond the traditional limits of liberal tolerance and the false consensus of inclusion policy. Without a widening of democratic cultural provision beyond the marketplace – underpinned by a commitment to substantive equality – discrimination and social division will continue to grow.

Beyond Regeneration and the Market

Social inclusion policy is a symptom not only of the steady decline of the welfare state since the late 1970s, but also of the economic impact of globalisation, seen most dramatically in Britain in the ascendancy of finance capital and the collapse of the industrial sector. To counter the widespread social dislocation this has caused, state and local authority agencies have invested in cultural regeneration projects, bringing together the public sector and the marketplace to enhance ‘competitiveness’ under the banner of ‘true partnership’. Cultural regeneration has taken a variety of forms, but the process of wished-for transition is the same. As expressed in the film, *Billy Elliot*, the crisis of historic working-class communities is to be resolved by the hope of upward mobility through culture.

However, an increasingly unfettered market creates levels of inequality which make a mockery of cultural regeneration projects as a substantial remedy. (A key index of the extent of social exclusion is the prison population, with rates of incarceration in Britain now exceeding those of Libya, Burma, Malaysia and

68. Robbie Dinwoodie, ‘Voting change “would turn the clock back”’, *Herald*, 28 August 2003. There is, of course, no need further to gerrymander the distorting results produced by first past the post elections to the Westminster parliament.

Turkey).⁶⁹ Cultural regeneration policies contribute nothing to combating social exclusion; their fascination with market forces can only undermine previous levels of equality sustained by the public sector. Indeed, they often involve the transfer of large sums of public money to private interests, seen most dramatically in the building of the new Guggenheim museum in Bilbao.⁷⁰ Regeneration's fantastic resolution – marketplace egalitarianism – offers nothing to those who want to challenge rising poverty and mend the crumbling infrastructure of Britain's cities.

Today, the ideology of 'partnership' – the coming together of private enterprise and public provision – is dominant in British municipal life, resulting in the erosion of politics from public decision-making. In practice, partnership undermines democratic participation, boosts market 'solutions' over collective provision and reduces the capacity of workers to fight for the redistribution of resources. The gurus of cultural regeneration replace politics and ideology with various vacuous notions of partnership and culture.⁷¹ The logical political conclusion here is corporatism – the combination of business, political and trade union interests in the form of a forced consensus under the authoritarian, that is anti-democratic, direction of the state.⁷²

69. According to Home Office statistics, the prison population of England and Wales has increased by 22 per cent since 1997 to 73,688 in January 2004. By the end of the decade Home Office projections predict a population of between 91,400 and 109,600. Further facts and figures are available from the Prison Reform Trust at <http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk>.

70. Established by the Samuel R. Guggenheim Foundation, a private trust based in New York, the museum's construction deprived local and regional governments of \$100 million in building costs, not to mention unknown ongoing operational and administrative expenses; \$50 million for a new Spanish and Basque art collection for the museum; and \$20 million in the form of a tax free 'donation' to the Foundation as a 'rental fee'. See Rectanus, *Culture Incorporated*, p. 178.

71. Thus Charles Landry argues that the 'key issue is whether there is true partnership'. But he goes on to concede that '[e]xamples from around the world suggest that sometimes there is collaboration without joint agenda setting, or if strategy is planned jointly, implementation can be problematical, either in terms of budgets, resources, timing or authority being handed over'. Landry gives a candid account of everyday politics surrounding regeneration policy, but refuses to name it as such. For the cultural regenerator, politics amounts to the failure of partnership. See Landry's *The Creative City: A Toolkit for Urban Innovators*, (London: Earthscan, 2000), p. 190.

72. See Francis Mulhern's definition of corporatism in *Culture/Metaculture*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 181: '...social theories that model society (or the good society) on the body, seeing it as a complex of interdependent parts and functions, all making their necessary, mutually non-exchangeable contributions to the health of the whole. [Corporatism] is accordingly anti-individualist in temper (the notion of competition between parts of the body is absurd) and also anti-socialist (the notion of a struggle between the hands and the head is equally absurd – as are democracy and equality).... The logic of corporatism is always, finally, authoritarian. The familiar corporations of the present (say, publishing houses and universities), with their corporate missions and visions and values, seems a world away from the corporatist schemes of the 1930s, but they are not'.

Historically, corporatism has taken many forms, although its most extreme manifestation occurred during the 1920s and 1930s with the ascendancy of fascism in Italy. Under Mussolini the state successfully negated competing political programmes and ideological interests in order to extend its control over the whole of society.⁷³ In less dictatorial guise, corporatism has played a significant role in post-war British politics, perhaps especially in the social pact established between capital and labour whereby trade union leaderships have consistently accommodated themselves to commercial interests in return for minor concessions (modest redistribution, pensions and other benefits, low unemployment etc). However, since the 1970s, this social compact has been overturned by the neoliberal offensive, although trade union bureaucracies in Britain and abroad continue to adhere to notions of partnership despite systematic attacks from business and the state on workers' rights and conditions of employment.⁷⁴ The fact that the language of 'partnership' is so prevalent in the public sector is an indication of the extent to which collective social provision has now been undermined by the incursion of market forces.

Whilst we make no direct parallels between contemporary Britain and fascist Italy, the rise of corporatist thinking in recent years is alarming. Widespread disenfranchisement, especially amongst working-class voters, mounting inequality and declining welfare provision could potentially produce a social formation that turns decisively against democracy. The increasingly authoritarian tenor of David Blunkett's social policy, especially on asylum and immigration issues, not to mention the wider dangers posed by Blair's foreign-policy adventurism, are threatening. Gordon Brown's 'flexible' employment strategies work further to impoverish and disempower working-class constituencies. Although right-wing populist parties have not yet made significant advances in Britain in comparison with their counterparts on the continent of Europe, there have been worrying signs that they may do so in the foreseeable future.

Social inclusion's efforts to manufacture a false consensus can only bolster the strength of anti-democratic forces. Arguments for tolerance are pointless if people are not encouraged to discuss how their different interests do, or do not, intersect. This is the practical foundation of social solidarity and internationalism; it is the

73. See, most recently, Richard Bosworth, *Mussolini*, (London: Arnold, 2002).

74. Asbjørn Wahl, 'European labor: the ideological legacy of the social pact', *Monthly Review*, January 2004, pp. 37-49. This article is available at <http://www.monthlyreview.org/0104wahl.htm>. For a global analysis of the effects of partnership, see Kim Moody, *Workers in a Lean World: Unions in the International Economy*, (London: Verso, 1997).

pre-requisite of a healthy democracy. The corporatist logic of influential private consultancies like Demos, Comedia and most recently Compass can only further undermine democracy and collective resources by enhancing enterprise-led regeneration and perpetuating the myth of equality in the marketplace. For this reason, Demos' current efforts to 're-vision' Scotland's future in its Scotland 2020 project should be contested.⁷⁵ In attempting to appeal to all political persuasions, 'think tank' corporatism shows democratic commitment to none. It can never serve the interests of a majority of citizens.

The Struggle for Cultural Democracy

As the logic of the market encroaches ever further into the public sector, engaging in the struggle for cultural democracy is crucial to sustaining the autonomy and creative capacities of cultural producers and their audiences. For too long, cultural workers and artists have ignored the politics of cultural provision, focusing instead on narrow specialisms and immediate institutional interests. Meanwhile, culture has become embroiled in supplying what one leading arts manager recently described to us as 'palliative measures' for a state which is no longer able to apply even elementary mechanisms of social justice. Tokenising ideals of cultural inclusion are worthless in a country where 44.6% of the workforce are deemed to be low paid.⁷⁶

Inevitably, this presents wider political challenges which are difficult in terms of thought and collective action to resolve. As writers like George Monbiot have emphasised, in recent decades the enormous power of globalised capital has considerably enfeebled the nation state and parliamentary representation.⁷⁷ The labour movement has been progressively weakened and now offers little sustained resistance to corporate expansion. Governments can only tinker at the edges of a world system that works disproportionately in favour of capital's domination with devastating consequences. A state that wants to take even small steps to curtail the social and environmental damage imposed by transnational corporations faces instant disinvestment and an exodus of capital and jobs.

75. See Douglas Fraser, 'Architects of Cool Britannia set their sights on Scotland', *Sunday Herald*, 4 January 2004, p. 4.

76. This is according to the less than exacting criteria established by the Council of Europe. See Gerry Mooney and Charlie Johnstone, 'Scotland divided: poverty, inequality and the Scottish parliament', *Critical Social Policy*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2000, p. 169.

77. George Monbiot, *The Age of Consent*, (London: Flamingo, 2003).

Monbiot's solution is to call for an internationalised democracy, a world parliament to match and reverse the power of the marketplace. Only a democratic forum on such a scale, he argues, can counter the power wielded by transnational corporations and authoritarian global institutions like the World Trade Organisation and International Monetary Fund. This is a laudable, revolutionising objective, but Monbiot has few clear ideas about how this global polity is to be achieved. Who will constitute the political agency to renew democracy so that the interests of the majority might outweigh the destructive power and huge resources wielded by the few? How will this solidarity be mobilised?

We can't here present easy solutions to this question – a progressive politics must be fought out over many years of collective struggle. But we do take this opportunity to affirm the historical truth that such change is political and has always originated from below. Those who wish to subdue such forces, or engage them in pre-selected forms of cultural practice, are the enemies of democracy. The cultural mechanisms of social inclusion are too easily incorporated into the reductive logic of the marketplace. If the language of 'cultural entitlement' is to be meaningful it must acknowledge the right to a contested politics of culture. As Walter Benjamin argued during the 1930s, a truly human culture can never be secured when politics and social difference become the ornaments of cultural expression.

If, indeed, there is a growing crisis of democratic legitimation and social justice in Scotland today, then cultural workers must work collectively with others to offer forms of political resistance – this is as true of the cultural sphere as of any other. This means extending our activities beyond the production of critical artworks and fighting, as we have attempted with this pamphlet, to renew cultural policy. Disenfranchisement and mounting social inequality should be taken seriously; mass anxiety and dissatisfaction need to be politicised and channelled into class-based politics to improve living and working conditions for the poor. For cultural workers, this means combating commercial vested interests within institutions as well as refusing the superficial popularisation of the market and the false language of customer service. It involves mobilising through trade unions and building cultural programmes around political issues. It implies abandoning narrow institutional interests for a discussion of cultural provision as a whole. And it means refusing to co-opt audiences into existing institutional frameworks so as to obstruct state agencies in their efforts to use culture to recompose capitalism's social relations of production. Overturning social inclusion policy is a key target here.

Doubtless in the coming months new forms of 'governing by cultures' will appear and the proponents of tokenism will continue to promote impossible visions of social justice to be enacted at little cost to the wealthy. In all likelihood arts technocrats and their consultants will continue to substitute weak notions of community, identity and diversity for class politics and ideology. In expanding the realm of popular communication and creativity, cultural democracy offers a vital challenge to such manoeuvring. As such it is an important step towards wider socialist renewal. We invite readers to engage with our critique and to contribute their own ideas as to how such a transformation might be won.

Further Reading

- Rasheed Araeen et. al.,
Third Text Reader on Art, Culture and Theory,
(London and New York: Continuum International, 2002)
- Brian Barry,
Culture and Inequality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001)
- Walter Benjamin,
'The author as producer', reprinted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-1990*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 483 - 89
- Walter Benjamin,
Understanding Brecht,
(London: Verso, 2002)
- David Byrne,
Social Exclusion,
(Buckingham: Open University Press, 1999)
- Paulo Freire,
Pedagogy of the Oppressed,
(Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972)
- Ruth Levitas,
The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour,
(London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1998)
- Justin Lewis and Toby Miller (eds.),
Critical Cultural Policy Studies,
(Oxford: Blackwell, 2003)
- Colin Leys,
Market-Driven Politics: Neoliberal Democracy and the Public Interest,
(London: Verso, 2001)

- Jim McGuigan,
Culture and the Public Sphere,
(London: Routledge, 1996)
- Jim McGuigan,
Rethinking Cultural Policy,
(Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2004)
- István Mészáros,
Beyond Capital: Towards a Theory of Transition,
(London: Merlin Press, 1995)
- István Mészáros,
Socialism or Barbarism,
(New York: Monthly Review Press, 2002)
- Toby Miller and George Yúdice,
Cultural Policy,
(London: Sage, 2002)
- George Monbiot,
The Age of Consent,
(London: Flamingo, 2003)
- Francis Mulhern,
Culture/Metaculture,
(London: Routledge, 2000)
- Leo Panitch and Colin Leys,
The End of Parliamentary Socialism,
(London: Verso, 2001)
- Alan Sinfield,
Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain,
(London: Athlone, 1997)

Notes

Notes

